



Kimberly A. Foster  
Executive Director

# LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

## **COMMISSIONERS:**

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ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, CHAIR  
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS  
TRULA J. WORTHY-CLAYTON

## APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **June 15, 2009**, in Room 140 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim accounting or transcription of events at this meeting.**

### **COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Was Not Established)**

Carol O. Biondi	Martha Trevino Powell
Dr. La-Doris McClaney	Sandra Rudnick
Rev. Cecil Murray	Adelina Sorkin

### **COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)**

Patricia Curry	Steven M. Olivas, Esq.
Ann Franzen	Tina Pedersen
Susan Friedman	Stacey Savelle
Helen Kleinberg	Dr. Harriette F. Williams
	Trula J. Worthy-Clayton

### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Sorkin. Since a quorum was not established, the meeting continued for information only.

### **II. INTRODUCTIONS**

Self introductions were made in the audience.

### **III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

No Action Taken.

#### **IV. CHAIR'S REPORT**

- **Action to Cancel July 6, 2009 Regular Commission Meeting**  
No Action Taken.

Chair Sorkin announced that the Board of Supervisors approved the Arroyo Consulting Group Report on Commissions (Commission Report) on June 9, 2009 and accepted the recommendation to eliminate 11 inactive County Commissions. The Chair also stated the Board amended the Motion regarding the Commission Report, and has directed the CEO to review the remaining Commissions for duplication of their mission and possibly recommend merging or elimination of other Commissions.

Health snacks were provided in appreciation of Commissioner Worthy-Clayton's service to children and families while she was a Commissioner.

#### **V. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

##### **Executive Committee**

Chair Sorkin reported on the Executive Committee meeting with Sheila Shima and Dr. Marvin Southard regarding the Commission and CEO partnership. She informed the Commission that some of the concerns presented by the Committee regarding Mental Health were:

- Lack of communication between Mental Health, Probation, and DCFS
- Need for an electronic data sharing with County departments
- The development of a continuum of care
- Mental health/substance abuse treatment in Probation camps
- Evaluations and outcomes
- Integration of case management
- Training and cross training of Children's Social Workers (CSWs)/Mental Health Workers (MHs) together
- Expand private sector models such as Shields and Magnolia Place
- Clarification of the structure for Integrated Services Workers for accountability
- Need for facilitators
- Need for departments to improve collaboration in the lower staff levels
- Coordinate assessments, increase services to foster youth in camps, and for educational services
- Mental Health funding for 20 year olds and up
- Concerns regarding unspent Mental Health funds for children and youth.

Chair Sorkin stated that the Committee will continue working with the Health/Mental Health Cluster on these issues to ensure they are implemented.

**Relative Care Committee**

No Report Given.

**Faith Based Committee**

Chair Sorkin reported that she attended the County of Los Angeles' Department of Mental Health 2009 California Conference on Mental Health and Spirituality, the Journey to Wholeness; and that Commissioner Reverend Murray was one of the keynote speakers. She stated that Reverend Murray discussed meaningful existence and spiritual hope, meaning as the gateway of health and healing, and the need for a holistic approach; and a total well-being that includes physical, mental, social, environment, family, spiritual, and religious domains; and the need to make these pieces fit. In addition he also spoke about how hopelessness wipes out hope and how man cannot live without meaning. Chair Sorkin stated that these concepts are especially important for the children in "the system" to have a sense of hope, meaning, and a sense that they belong.

Reverend Murray added the importance of communication and of moving away from silos. He inquired of Director Ploehn if it is possible to provide children involved with DCFS a sense of hope and belonging; and whether there have been any meetings with community groups regarding this issue. Trish Ploehn responded that she believes everything is possible and that DCFS has conducted many meetings with the Faith Based community and it appears that the community and DCFS are moving in the same direction. In addition, she stated that much progress has been made in the last five years in terms of integration of services.

The Chair reported that the second key note speaker, Rabbi Edward Feinstein, from the Valley Beth Shalom Synagogue spoke of Stories that Hurt, Stories that Heal, who spoke about the need to belong and have a purpose. He further indicated the role of the Clergy is that of a triage. He stated that Clergy determine what people might need and then tries to make a wise referral. He stated that people trust clergy but clergy are not always capable of the mental health intervention that some individuals need.

**VI. DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Trish Ploehn, DCFS Director provided an update on the County's budget situation, and reported the State has made recommendations for an additional 10% cut to child welfare administration, resulting in approximately \$14 million to DCFS, (\$22 million in cuts to \$8 million of revenue). She also stated DCFS cuts will include group homes and Foster Family Agencies (FFAs). FFAs have already experienced a reduction in beds because of a trend in the Department towards more home-based placements.

Director Ploehn also reported that last week the Joint Senate Assembly Budget Conference Committee voted against the cuts to child welfare and Karen Bass is continuing to fight against any cuts to child welfare. In addition, there continues to be no outcome regarding the issue of Alameda County and Los Angeles County being exempted from cuts as they are IV-E waiver counties. She further stated that even if L.A. County should prevail in this issue, the contract has a 30 day opt-out provision, which gives the Federal, State, or County

30 days to cancel the contract altogether. She stated that it would be disastrous since this waiver has been a “savior” for Los Angeles child welfare services.

Director Ploehn stated that her last piece to the discussion on budget cuts is on the Dependency Court. The court will be closing one day a month, the third Wednesday of the month, through June 2010. They are also considering changing Adoption Saturday to Adoption Friday.

Chair Sorkin inquired about a request that went to the Board of Supervisors to approve out-of-county placements and why they need to go out of the county. Director Ploehn stated that it all depends on the needs of the child; some children have special mental health issues that are better met elsewhere. Director Ploehn stated that they will be meeting tomorrow and will mention the possibility of recreating the facilities with empty beds to handle the children with higher needs including Probation Youth.

Director Ploehn stated she would like to have Eric Marts, DCFS Deputy Director come and present to the Commission on the Emergency Response (ER) Academy that will be up in August 2009. The Academy will re-train the Emergency Response Workers and Supervisors to do more high quality in-depth investigations. The staff will be trained from August 2009-April 2010. The training will also include the area around warrants; how to determine when there is or is not a need for search warrants and detention warrants when taking children into custody. Another part of this initiative includes concurrent or joint investigations with law enforcement and sharing information on investigations in order to make better decisions on both the criminal and child welfare aspects.

Director Ploehn announced that DCFS has two new Deputy Directors and a new Commission Liaison. Each person gave a brief self-introduction as follows:

Maryam Fatemi stated that she began working for DCFS in 1984 as a Social Worker. The projects she is currently working on includes:

- The Dependency Education Pilot Project – In the Pomona Unified School District and Montebello Unified School District in collaboration with the First Supervisorial District and the Education Coordinating Council. She is hoping to roll out this project to other offices.
- Community Based Placement
- Over-Representation of African-American Children in the System. There is now a Policy Group with DCFS and Judge Nash on disproportionality .
- Probation and DCFS System Integration - Crossover Kids (she would like to make a presentation on their progress in this area to the Commission)
- Youth Permanency Units - funded by the waiver. They search and reunite children with their families and have been very successful. They recently won the National Association of Counties (NACo) Award.

Commissioner Biondi stated that the State CSA has funded the Burns Institute to do an analysis around Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) in Probation. She suggested they get together to discuss collaboration on this and Crossover.

Norma Doctor-Sparks stated that she began working as a Social Worker, then Deputy Attorney General in Hawaii, and also administered the State of Hawaii Child Welfare Services and the Child Support Agencies. She also worked as a consultant with an Information Technology (IT) firm and in 2000 began the State of California redesign of child welfare. Prior to accepting the position of Deputy Director for DCFS she was the Director of the Department of Family and Children's Services for Santa Clara County for seven years. The projects she is working on in Service Area 4 include:

- Up Front Assessments
- Participating with DPSS Linkages
- Kinship
- Enhanced Visitation Services – increase possibility of reunification and working with the faith-based community to establish visitation centers. They are trying to integrate and maximize services in Los Angeles County.

Chair Sorkin stated that she had met the Executive Director of the YNOT Foundation who may be interested in making her church available as a visitation center. Ms. Fatemi stated that in the Pomona area they have already successfully implemented visitation centers in churches and will be happy to contact this person.

Commissioner Reverend Murray inquired if there is a consensus among Social Workers that caseloads are excessive. Ms. Doctor-Sparks stated that in some instances, there are excessive caseloads and they are working on reducing caseloads in Los Angeles County, resulting in the Social Workers providing more in-depth case management, such as attending TDMs.

Commissioner Rudnick inquired about the current caseload for Social Workers. Director Ploehn stated that the caseloads are averaging 21-25, in some offices as high as 25-35. She stated that optimally the caseloads should be 12-15 in order for Social Workers to do the amount of quality work required. Since there are no available resources for additional SWs, they must use existing resources available to try to reduce the number of children in the system.

Director Ploehn introduced the new Commission Liaison, Cassandra Turner. Ms. Turner stated that she has been with DCFS for 16 years and for the past five to six years has managed the Critical Incidents/Child Fatality Review Section.

Chair Sorkin acknowledged Nancy Castilla as the Commission's Liaison and stated that the Commission will miss her.

## **VIII. PRESENTATION**

### **• Adoptions Update**

Mr. Bill Thomas, DCFS Assistant Division Chief of the Adoption and Permanency Resources Division discussed the following topics:

- The trend of increases in reunifications due to Concurrent Planning, indicating that there are many factors that contribute to the increase in reunifications and adoptions

such as points of engagement, concurrent planning, team decision making, and upfront assessments.

- Children in Out-of-Home Care - In 2003, there were 25,161 children in out-of-home care and in 2008, it went down to 16,710.
- Reunifications - In 2003, there were 4,985 (19.8%) and in 2007, they went up to 6,345 (33.1%).
- Adoption Finalizations – In 2003, there were 1,997 and in 2008, there were 2,094. For Adoptions, as a percentage of out-of-home care, in 2003 it was 7.9% and in 2008 it was 12.5%.
- Timelines to Permanency – In 2004, the time that a child entered the system to the time an adoption was finalized averaged 53.60 months. In 2005, they began Concurrent Planning (CP). In the pilot offices the time went down to 43.42 months for CP cases. In 2009 (as of March 31, 2009), the time has gone down to 35.90 months for CP cases and an overall average of 39.78 months.

Commissioner Biondi asked how many reunifications and adoptions re-enter the system and come back to DCFS. Mr. Thomas stated that most adoptions are with relatives; and from October 2005 to September 2008 there have been no adoptions disrupted, and within the past six years there have been three disruptions. One of the three was subsequently adopted, another is in the process and they are still working on one. They are working on a way for the ER workers to be better able to identify whether a child is re-entering the system and has previously been in a foster home, and will review these cases in order to determine what went wrong and to improve services. Director Ploehn stated that the federal standard for disrupted reunifications is 9.9%, and that three or four years ago, Los Angeles County was at 4% because they were not reunifying families, thus less disrupted reunifications. Last year it went up to 10.6% and ended in 2008 at 10.0% because of the increase in reunifications. The Re-Entry Study conducted about six months ago showed some reasons for the high rate was that at times they were moving reunifications too quickly and not making sure the services would hold. Also, some disrupted reunifications that were included in the 10.0% proved to be for good reasons; such as a child being placed with the father while the mother improved her circumstances then returning the child with the mother.

Chair Sorkin inquired if there is a different length of time in care for children under the age of three. In addition, what has been done to improve efforts to find fathers and paternal relatives to free children for adoption. Mr. Thomas replied that they do not have specific data on the timelines for these cases but by law these cases are required to move faster and the first permanency hearing is held at six months, and stated that they are doing more family finding, including the paternal side, up front and they are placing 60% of children with family. Trish Ploehn added that they are working with the courts to begin a pilot project on family finding assessments at the front end to tap into fathers and the paternal relatives to provide permanency for children.

Mr. Thomas re-iterated that the Adoption Saturday in November is cancelled but they are considering having it on Friday.

## **VII. REVIEW OF COMMISSION PRIORITIES**

The following updates were given regarding the Commission's Priorities.

**Wellness** – Chair Sorkin reported that meetings have taken place with Chief Executive Office (CEO) staff. With respect to the Board Motion on Childhood Obesity, the CEO will convene the meeting in July 2009.

**Relative Care** – Chair Sorkin informed the Commission that she and Commissioner Franzen will be the Commission Leads for the CEO Commission Workgroup on Relative Care. They met with staff from the CEO and discussed the importance of ensuring that services are available for the approximately 15,000 children placed with relatives. The CEO staff informed them that there is an increased effort by DCFS to increase placements with relatives through Kin GAP. Director Ploehn agreed and stated that they are trying to find a way to use the waiver funds to ensure that services are available to this population after they have exited the system. Chair Sorkin referenced the Commission report sent to the Board of Supervisors on Kin GAP and stated that once Kin GAP is accepted the child and relative open case and do not have a Social Worker. This poses a problem for children when they turn 14 years old and are not able to access Independent Living Program (ILP) services. Chair Sorkin stated that they also discussed the possibility of using Stimulus money for relative caregivers who may be in danger of losing their homes. Chair Sorkin also stated that in Pasadena there is a program called MASH, which assists seniors with the maintenance of their homes. This type of program administered by cities could also be made available to relative caregivers. Chair Sorkin also discussed the need to make information more accessible for those without computers. This workgroup will reconvene in July. Chair Sorkin also informed the Commission that Commissioner Williams will continue to Chair the Relative Care Committee, along with her other Commission assignment as representative for First 5. She has been actively working on the First 5 Strategic Plan.

**Prevention** – Commissioner Rudnick reported meeting with the Joint Children's Commissions, with the Children's Council as the lead. She stated that they are trying to draft an umbrella of children's issues without duplicating efforts of the various Commissions involved. They have already met twice and will continue meeting monthly. Chair Sorkin stated that although Prevention will remain a priority for the Commission, they are concentrating their efforts on the Joint Children's Commissions' meetings and will update the CEO staff as to their progress.

**Crossover** – Commissioner Biondi reported there was a preliminary meeting this morning with the CEO staff. Information was shared and materials will be provided at a future meeting.

**TAY** – This was the first workgroup implemented. No update available at this time.

**IX. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Marjorie Shelvy, Legal Aid Foundation, stated that she wanted to emphasize that it is imperative that the Family Finding efforts take place early in the case, at the up front assessment. Ms. Shelvy also stated there is a new proposed regulation for foster care overpayments. Currently under State law, when there is an overpayment to a foster family home, they are not required to repay if the overpayment is the result of the County's error. She stated although the County is relieved of these obligations, the new regulations will require the State to pay the Federal government and if the caregiver does not agree to a repayment agreement, or does not abide by the agreement, the caregiver will be charged interest. She also stated that the Notice of Action being sent to caregivers does not state that they are not required to pay if it is the County's error. Comments are being taken through August 12 or 13, 2009. Commissioner Biondi inquired if caregivers are aware that they have received an overpayment. Ms. Shelvy stated that most caregivers do not know the amount they are supposed to receive and assume they are receiving the correct amount. Commissioner Biondi suggested that the department find out why this is happening and inform the caregivers of the amount they should receive. Commissioner Biondi suggested having Social Workers implement finding families up front at assessment.

Cynthia Billey, Alliance for Children's Rights, stated that there is a process regarding overpayments, the caregivers receive notice and file an appeal, however many caregivers do not have advocates to help them through the process.

She also stated that Adoption Saturday has been around for 10 years and they will be celebrating the 10 Year Anniversary of National Adoption Day on November 21, 2009. A national press conference is being planned, and it is anticipated that the White House will be involved. She stated that Adoption Saturday has been very effective and requested that Director Ploehn look into the costs associated with an Adoption Saturday and if it is not possible, consider having an Adoption Friday.

**X. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

No Announcements.

**XI. ADJOURN**

Chair Sorkin adjourned the meeting.